

Task Force on the Economic Future of Western Maryland

July 29, 2021; 10:00 AM

Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance:

- Senator George Edwards, *Co-Chair*
- Delegate Jason Buckel, *Co-Chair*
- Jack Schammel, *Asst. Director of Entrepreneur and Ecosystem Empowerment, TEDCO*
- Jeff Cline, *Washington County Commissioner, MACO*
- Shelley McIntire, *Hagerstown City Council Member, MML*
- Al Delia, *Vice President for Economic and Regional Engagement, Frostburg State University*
- Jake Shade, *Allegany County Commissioner, Tri-County Council of Western Maryland*
- Juli McCoy, *Executive Director, Allegany County Chamber of Commerce*
- Jim Hinebaugh, *Garrett County Chamber of Commerce*
- Paul Frey, *President and CEO, Washington County Chamber of Commerce*
- Andrew Sargent, *Sr. Business Development Representative, Western MD, Maryland Department of Commerce*

I. Call to Order

During roll call, four new members to the task force (Jack Schammel, Jeff Cline, Juli McCoy, and Jim Hinebaugh) introduced themselves.

a. *Remarks by the Co-Chairs*

Senator Edwards welcomed attendees and noted he was glad to see all members. He urged new members to stay involved. Delegate Buckel noted that he and Senator Edwards had been monitoring approximately nine bills in the past legislative session. Some of these priorities passed, some stalled, and some got wrapped up with other items. The task force's main recommendation, the Western Maryland Economic Future Investment Fund, passed in the Senate; the Senate agreed to fund it for \$15 million with \$7.5 million in mandated funding and \$7.5 million in discretionary funding. This did not make it through the House. The House passed money that would have provided economic development money for universities and economic development but the bill did not get assigned to Senator Edwards' committee and did not move forward. However, Delegate Buckel noted that they are confident they can make more progress in the next session now that bills are written and proposals are there. Delegate Buckel commented that with the extension of the body there are two things they would like to focus on. First, Delegate Buckel indicated he would like members to work on identifying new prospects and ideas. Delegate Buckel pointed to the recent funding awarded to Hagerstown for construction of an entertainment

complex downtown. This type of project will be great for Hagerstown and Delegate Buckel urged members to 'shoot for the moon' in the next six to twelve months to try to secure as much assistance as possible for the region. Delegate Buckel noted that the other focus of the body would be a return to in-person meetings which will hopefully allow for more input from private sector stakeholders in the region. Delegate Buckel suggested meeting at Frostburg State University and having representatives from bioscience, tech sectors, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, and other areas to come and talk about what it would take to kickstart those sectors in Western Maryland.

II. Economic Data Update

Michael Siers, staff for the task force, gave a presentation on Western Maryland's economy with the most recent data available. This presentation served as an update to the economic presentations from the fall of 2020. Mr. Siers' presentation covered population growth, labor force changes, employment, and unemployment in the region.

III. Legislative Session Recap

Senator Edwards commented on the Western Maryland Economic Future Investment Fund proposal which passed in the Senate. Senator Edwards commented that while the bill that passed came down to \$15 million in funding, he would not like to go lower than that. Senator Edwards stated it was past time for the state to invest in Western Maryland and he would like to see the state continue to invest in infrastructure in the region. Delegate Buckel asked that a tracker of legislative priorities from the last session be created and sent around to the members. Michael Siers said he would create that. Delegate Buckel also noted that a legislative initiative on adding biomass to the RPS was sent to summer study and the hope is that the bill will be reported on favorably. Mary Clapsaddle mentioned that the Governor recently promoted Frostburg State University for helping develop the next generation of clean energy so attention was focused on the region.

IV. Next Steps and Future Meetings

Delegate Buckel asked that task force members with ideas for speakers at the next meeting provide names to Michael Siers. Juli McCoy suggested speakers from IBM or Grow West. Al Delia noted that he would reach out to Mr. Siers. Al Delia noted that the region has a major opportunity with all of the funding coming from programs like the American Rescue Plan. Al Delia urged members and other stakeholders to look outside their silos and cooperate across municipal and county lines on projects that would benefit the whole region. Senator Edwards suggested that the next meeting be held at Frostburg State University and Al Delia agreed with this. Senator Edwards also commented on the influx of money for broadband coming to the region. Senator Edwards noted that the region faces some economic headwinds and specifically noted the need for more middle income housing and suggested a future meeting should look into this. Jack Schammel asked if any commercial or residential real estate people had spoken to the task force. Al Delia noted that the Greater Cumberland Committee has

put together a grant proposal for a professional housing study. The Greater Cumberland Committee has not heard back but this information would be applicable across the region, even in Washington County if the grant is successful. Jack Schammel noted that TEDCO has observed that the pandemic has led to some permanent shifts in the number of people who will be working from home. Because of this, people are leaving urban areas and rural areas stand to benefit. This is a boon to the region but increases the need for broadband. Senator Edwards agreed with this, saying that the area around Deep Creek Lake was packed and the major challenge now seemed to be getting workers back to work.

V. Public Comment

Chip Wood spoke on behalf of the Civil War Rail Trail. Mr. Wood highlighted a report by the MORE Commission which noted the positive economic impacts associated with state parks. Mr. Wood requested that this data be brought into the final report to highlight the importance of projects (such as the Civil War Rail Trail) in boosting the region's economy. Michael Siers thanked Mr. Wood and indicated he would look into adding this information in. Senator Edwards noted that the task force would like to have DNR more involved in regional economic development. Senator Edwards noted that state park cabins are full and perhaps private enterprise can help out with that in a public-private partnership. Mr. Wood noted that surveys show strong support in Washington County for more parkland.

VI. Closing Remarks/Adjournment

The co-chairs thanked all members and members of the public for a productive meeting. Delegate Buckel noted that task force members will receive a tracker of legislative items in advance of the next meeting.